

## The Editor's Perspective

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## The Editor's Perspective

THIS ISSUE of the *Annals of Iowa* focuses on women in Iowa history. There are feature articles on two sisters who worked in Civil War diet kitchens and on women freethinkers in nineteenth-century Iowa. In addition, there is an article describing the collections related to Iowa political life in the Iowa Women's Archives. It is noteworthy that all three articles make at least some reference to the work of one remarkable woman: Louise Rosenfield Noun.

Noun told her own unlikely story in her autobiography, *Journey to Autonomy* (1990). Her journey was not only from a privileged life of dependence to one of empowered autonomy, but also toward ever increasing involvement in a network of progressive activism on behalf of women and civil liberties. As part of that journey, she decided to investigate the roots of the women's movement in Iowa that had become so important to her. The result was the book that is cited in all three articles here: *Strong-Minded Women: The Emergence of the Woman-Suffrage Movement in Iowa* (1969). Written before the emergence of women's history and women's studies in the academy, the book has become an indispensable source for anyone researching and writing about the history of women in Iowa.

Unfortunately, as Noun pursued the research for that book, she discovered a paucity of primary sources about the women she wanted to write about. That led to her dream of establishing an archive devoted exclusively to collecting and preserving the records of Iowa women. The story of how she worked with Mary Louise Smith (another remarkable Iowa woman) to fulfill that dream—and a description of some of the resulting records that are being preserved—is told in Sharon Lake's article in this issue.

But not all women whose stories deserve to be preserved maintain written records. So Noun interviewed a number of Iowa feminists and recorded the results of those interviews in *More Strong-Minded Women: Iowa Feminists Tell Their Stories*

(1992). That book will become an increasingly important resource as historians begin to turn their attention to the history of Iowa women's achievements in the last half of the twentieth century.

In the last dozen years of Noun's long and productive life, her efforts to preserve and tell the stories of women in Iowa history only intensified. In those years, she not only helped to found the Iowa Women's Archives and completed her memoir and *More Strong-Minded Women*, but she also wrote *Iowa Women in the WPA* (1999) and *Leader and Pariah: Annie Savery and the Campaign for Women's Rights in Iowa, 1868-1891* (published posthumously by the Iowa Women's Archives in 2003).

Her publications record is one to make most professional historians envious, but Noun was at least as important as a historical actor in her own right. Through leadership roles in the League of Women Voters, the Iowa Civil Liberties Union, and the Chrysalis Foundation, she led fights for urban reform, reapportionment of the Iowa legislature, protection of free speech rights for high school students, and women's access to higher education, among many other issues in which she was involved. Everyone who is concerned about the preservation of Iowa history is indebted to Louise Noun, as is every Iowa citizen who is concerned about civil liberties, the rights of women, and good government.

—Marvin Bergman, editor

P.S. In my "Editor's Perspective" in the Fall 2003 issue, I called attention to the need to put wages and prices in historical perspective. I suggested a Web site that offered a simple way to do that, then noted that it's not really as simple as that simple calculation makes it seem, citing several sources that illustrated that point. Since then, a helpful librarian pointed out on the H-Iowa discussion list a useful Web site that complicates the picture even further; interested readers should check out the Economic History Services Web site at [www.eh.net/hmit/](http://www.eh.net/hmit/).

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